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Communications in Probation

by Judge Larry Gist, Member



An elaborate communications web helps our state's probation system provide effective supervision and rehabilitative services. This communication structure allows information, suggestions and advice to be shared among community supervision officers, their department directors, the judiciary, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) and the Texas Board of Criminal Justice (TBCJ).

The funding structure of the state's 121 community supervision and corrections departments (CSCD) requires effective communication among all parties in the probation arena for the system to operate. CSCDs are organized by judicial districts and are under the direct authority of district and county court at law judges, with the counties providing facilities, utilities and equipment. Core services and programs to be provided are determined by local CSCDs in accordance with the minimum operational standards developed by the TDCJ Community Justice Assistance Division (CJAD) and the measured success of those programs. The CJAD also tracks performance, monitors and reviews CSCD budgets, offers technical assistance and training, and provides both formula and competitive grant funding.

Effective communication in community supervision is achieved through a multi-level

approach. It begins with the Judicial Advisory Council (JAC), which is established in the Texas Government Code. The purpose of the JAC is to advise the CJAD director and the TBCJ on matters of interest to the judiciary. The JAC is a 12-member council; half of its members are appointed by the Chief Justice of the Texas Supreme Court, and the other half are appointed by the Presiding Judge of the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals. The council considers and offers recommendations to TDCJ on issues confronting the community supervision system. To facilitate its advisory role, a report from the JAC chairman is a standing item on each TBCJ meeting agenda.

The second tier in the community supervision communications web is the Probation Advisory Committee (PAC). The PAC is a 14-member committee appointed by the JAC chairman. It consists of nine CSCD directors, selected from each of the state's Administrative Judicial Regions, and five at-large positions. The at-large positions must include an urban CSCD director, a CSCD mid-manager, a residential facility director, a community supervision officer representative, and an ex officio member. The PAC serves the interest of their constituencies by providing information, formulating opinions and suggesting actions that would improve

local community corrections programs and services. Some of the items considered and advised upon include the TDCJ Legislative Appropriations Request, CJAD standards for the CSCDs, budget issues, the Interstate Compact as it relates to probation, and the Community Supervision Tracking System, a statewide database of offenders on community supervision developed and maintained by CJAD and used to determine and calculate funding for CSCDs.

The third communication tier covers front line community supervision officers. This group, the Supervision Officers Subcommittee (SOC), provides a venue for positive officer communications. It helps officers learn about statewide issues, share effective practices and channel information for consideration to the PAC. The SOC also provides opportunities to recognize officers at a statewide level.

Coordinated and effective communications allow state and local jurisdictions to work together and provide effective community supervision and rehabilitative services. In light of the nearly 420,000 individuals currently under community supervision in Texas, the communications web developed between the JAC, PAC, SOC and TDCJ is essential for smooth operation of the probation system. ●